

BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS, 338 E. FOOTHILL BLVD., P.O. BOX 419, ARCADIA, CALIF. 91006

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Alternative Heater Fires Arouse Concern

"The growing use of other devices including kerosene, portable electric, and LP-gas cabinet heaters is causing concern within the fire protection community," warns the *Fire Journal*. The number of accidents involving such equipment has also been growing.

The sale and use of alternative heating devices has expanded dramatically in the past few years. The drive to use alternative types of equipment has been brought on by increased energy costs for the most commonly used traditional devices. Consumers are now seeking to heat limited areas of the home rather than relying on universal forced air systems.

As the kind of heating devices used has changed in this country, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has observed that the number of fires associated with alternate heating devices has increased. Back in 1977, 22% of the fires in one and two-family dwellings were heating related. By 1982, that figure had jumped to 31%.

Included in the list are solid fuel units, kerosene heaters, electric heaters, natural gas heaters, LP-gas heaters, fuel oil heaters, and waste oil heaters.

But LP-gas hasn't caused fires.

The *Fire Journal* reported on a study done as a result of a cooperative agreement between the International Society of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI), The Fire Marshals Association of North America (FMANA), the International Assn. of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the NFPA. The objective of the study was to provide timely information to fire pro-

tection officials on a limited sample of alternative heating fires from the 1982-83 heating season.

In the course of the study, some 1200 reports were submitted to NFPA. Of these, 740 fire incidents were considered

Alternative Heating Fires By Type of Equipment

Type of Equipment	Total Incidents Reported	Civilian Deaths
Solid fuel heaters		
Fireplaces	120	9
Fireplace inserts	39	—
Wood stoves	292	15
Coal stoves	2	7
TOTAL (solid fuel heaters)	453	31
Kerosene heaters	194	33
Electric heaters	59	27
Natural gas heaters (fixed)	14	24
LP-Gas heaters (fixed)	13	1
Fuel oil heaters (portable)	4	—
Waste oil heaters	3	—
TOTALS	740	116

relevant to the study.

The largest portion of reported fires, according to the study, was attributed to solid-fuel heaters (61.3%). Kerosene heaters were next in line with 26.2% and electric heaters contributed 8% of the fires. Natural gas was low on the list with only 1.8%. More specific figures may be seen in the accompanying table (including LP-gas incidents). Of the 740 fires reported on in the study, there were

116 deaths, only one of which was attributable to an LP-gas heater.

The majority of the solid fuel heater fires were chimney fires, the main reason for which was improper inspection and/or failure to clean the stove pipe and chimney, which led to creosote formation, which in turn led to fires when it ignited. The next most common cause of fires was improper installation.

The number of LP-gas fires and deaths was so low that the report did not contain detailed information on causes. But, in the case of natural gas fires, the causes were leaking fuel, gas in the pipe, installation too close to combustibles and structural component factors. About 45.5% of the fires associated with natural gas heaters started in the bedroom, 27.3% in the living room and 18.2% in the bathroom.

The number of fire deaths were almost equally distributed among solid fuel (26.7%), kerosene (28.4%), electric (23.3%), and natural gas (20.6%).

When it comes to electric heaters, some users apparently have developed a false sense of security due to the lack of an open flame in these devices. This may help explain the relatively high incidence of bedroom fires from portable electric heaters.

Since there were so few incidents involving LP-gas heaters, there was little discussion about their use in the report. Only one caution was issued concerning them—one well-known among LP-gas people—and that was that "LP-Gas containers should always be stored outdoors."

